

Claims 2, 4, and 9-11 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer of the subject matter contained therein. Further, claims 12-28 have been added. Claims 1, 12, 18 and 24 are independent.

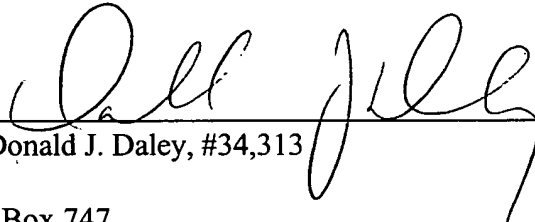
Applicants respectfully request entry of this Preliminary Amendment and further request an early indication of the allowability of claims 1, 3, 5-8 and 12-28 in connection with the present application.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. § 1.16 or under 37 C.F.R. § 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

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(Rev. 04/19/2000)